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ABSTRACT

This paper examines interpersonal communication training in organizations from a different perspective, focusing on the interpersonal communication training offered to supervisors in modern organizations. Most of this training focuses on interpersonal communication between supervisors and their employees. The premise of this paper is that supervisors and employees are from different cultures. Using the popular book, "Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus" (Gray, 1992), this paper attempts to illustrate the differences between supervisors and employees, similar to the differences between men and women highlighted in Gray's book. Using these metaphors highlights the differences in point of view, organizational orientation, personal motivation, and business values between supervisors and employees. Just like successful marital counseling or training in marital communication involves both husband and wife, successful interpersonal communication training in modern organizations should include both supervisors and employees. The entire work group should be included in the training sessions. Training employees separately from supervisors in communication skills, like training husbands and wives separately in effective marital communication, is likely to improve the overall communication in intended ways. (Contains 32 references.) (Author/CR)

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SUPERVISORS ARE FROM MARS, EMPLOYEES ARE FROM VENUS: COMMUNICATION IN THE "BOARDROOM"

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines interpersonal communication training in organization from a different perspective. The focus is on the interpersonal communication training offered to supervisors in modern organizations. Most of this training focuses on interpersonal communication between supervisors and their employees. The premise of this paper is that supervisors and employees are from different cultures. Using the ever-popular book, Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus (Gray, 1992), this paper attempts to illustrate the differences between supervisors and employees are similar to the differences between men and women highlighted in Gray's book.

Using these metaphors highlights the differences in point of view, organizational orientation, personal motivation, and business values between supervisors and employees. Just like successful marital counseling or training in marital communication involves **both** husband and wife, successful interpersonal communication training in modern organizations should include **both** supervisors and employees. The entire work group should be included in the training sessions. Training employees separately from supervisors in communication skills, like training husbands and wives separately in effective marital communication, is likely to improve the overall communication in intended ways.

The benefit of this approach is obvious.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout a person's life in an organization, from the initial interview to the final exit interview, interpersonal communication between supervisor and employee is at the forefront. Often problems in these interpersonal transactions, problems arise as a result of differing points of view and the lack of training in interpersonal communication skills. During these interactions, the problems created by poor or ineffective interpersonal communication training become ever-present. This is in light of the fact that many organizations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on training; specifically training supervisors and prospective supervisors in interpersonal communication skills.

The supervisor, because of her or his position, is typically in the unenviable position of attempting to bring order and clarity to these interpersonal communication situations with employees. This is especially true when supervisors and employees hold opposite points of view, when they are highly ego-involved in their disparate positions, and/or when individuals (whether supervisor or employee) hold to an irrational stance. However, the task of bringing clarity and understanding to these situations is not the sole responsibility of the supervisor. Each employee should assume equal responsibility in providing clarity

and understanding to the transaction. The goal of this manuscript is to uncover a natural connections between supervisors, employees, and interpersonal communication training. With this in mind, the following literature review examines mediation and negotiation.

The overriding problem to facilitate and enhance interpersonal communication training in modern organizations might be traced to the individual member's lack of competent mediation -- a clear communication skill. It is unacceptable and impractical to expect a supervisor, whether trained or untrained in interpersonal communication skills, to assume total responsibility to achieve interpersonal communication competence. For one thing, the supervisor may become as ego-involved in the situation along with the employee. In such instances, having employees trained in interpersonal communication might help reach competence in those interpersonal transactions.

Review of Literature

This review investigates literature on communication competence to establish a foundation for the interpersonal communication training needed in organizations. In an effort to establish this foundation, the nature of conflict and mediation are discussed. Pondy (1967) recognized the importance of conflict management, stating "A conflict episode can be thought of as a

gradual escalation to a state of disorder. If choice is the climax of a decision, then by analogy, open war or aggression is the climax of a conflict episode" (p. 299).

Pondy (1967) also discussed the positive nature of the "conflict aftermath" if the episode is resolved in mutually satisfactory ways. He referred to this phenomena as "the basis for a more cooperative relationship" that may motivate participants to confront other issues of potential conflict with the assurance that the conflict will be competently managed (p. 305). Interpersonal conflict is not to be avoided necessarily, therefore, but can be used to create a more positive interpersonal climate. Whether conflict serves as "functional" or "dysfunction" can be determined by evaluating its effect on "productivity, stability, or adaptability" (Pondy, p. 305).

Three categories of conflict communication are (1) avoidance, (2) distributive, and (3) integrative. Walton and McKersie (1965) defined these as: (1) the avoidance tactics are communication acts that reflect denial of the existence of conflict, (2) when distributive tactics are competitive and participants' view successful outcome as a big win, and (3) when integrative tactics are more cooperative. The use of distributive tactics during conflict is conducive to stalemates, especially when supervisors and/or employees are unwilling to change their position or point of view. Integrative tactics are used by parties who seek mutually beneficial outcomes. Supervisors and employees both should be able to competently demonstrate these

integrative tactics to facilitate mutually beneficial resolution of conflict.

On the basis of these assertions, Watkins (1974) forwarded a model of conflict. His model was a composite of the available information on conflict communication and included the following six axioms:

1. Conflict requires at least two parties capable of invoking sanctions on each other.
2. Conflicts arise due to the existence of a mutually desired but mutually unobtainable objective.
3. Each party in conflict has four possible types of action alternatives:
    a. to obtain the mutually desired objective,
    b. to end the conflict,
    c. to invoke sanctions against the opponent,
    d. to communicate something to the opponent.
4. Parties in conflict may have different value or perceptual systems.
5. Each party has resources which may be increased or diminished by implementation of action alternatives.
6. Conflict terminates only when each party is satisfied that it has 'won' or 'lost' or believes that the probable costs of continuing the conflict outweigh the probable costs of ending the conflict. (pp. 1-2)

Tidwell (1994) stated, "Those who experience conflict are hungry consumers, looking for more information on how to end the

conflict while winning as much as possible" (p. 8). Training supervisors and employees in interpersonal communication, including conflict management skills, will increase the likelihood that interpersonal communication transactions between supervisor and employee are positive so both parties feel they "won" something.

Group Members' Perceptions and Behaviors

Generally, supervisors and employees seek rewards that outweigh potential costs (Thilbaut & Kelley, 1959). Predicting costs and rewards can determine the selection of the interpersonal communication strategies. The exchange of information during the episode permits the participants to formulate predictions, and this knowledge guides their communicative behavior. Deutsch (1960) concluded from his experiment using the prisioners' dilemma game that positive outcomes are linked to availability of information. According to Putnam and Jones (1982), information exchange during negotiation can be divided into the following major areas: "(1) access to payoff information, (2) the amount of information exchanged, and (3) the disclosure of honest or accurate information" (p. 267).

Power and control issues are associated with the interpersonal relationship between supervisor and employee. Schelling (1960) successfully argued that if a party perceived that her or his opponent was not well informed on the issues, this perception strengthened the informed parties position but

was followed by altruistic behavior. Putnam and Jones (1982) found that the informed party often took unfair advantage of the uninformed party especially when the informed parties were bargaining from a distributive position. Information exchange does not always contribute to cooperative bargaining behavior, however, especially during distributive episodes, and can aggravate the conflict (Druckman & Zechmeister, 1973). The perception and interpretation of information determines the success of the interpersonal transaction and the interpersonal communication strategies selected by supervisors and employees.

If supervisors and/or employees interpret the others' behavior as threatening, according to Deutsch and Krauss (1960), there is less chance that the episode will be conducted cooperatively. "High verbal threat behavior" was defined by Marr (1974) as communication that "reflects the unwillingness of the source to consider other alternatives and which includes words of antagonism toward other individuals or toward their ideas" (p. 7).

Threatening behavior, usually, does not contribute to a mutually satisfactory interpersonal transaction (Deutsch & Krauss, 1960; Leathers, 1969; McCroskey & Wright, 1971; Scheidel & Crowell, 1966). Scholars concluded that threatening behavior "pulsates in frequency" throughout the communication episode (Marr, 1974, Scheidel & Crowell, 1966). It may disappear and reappear according the parties perception of their opponents' feedback. Threat was shown to inspire more threat, and low threat

was also reciprocated (Manusov, *et al.*, 1994). Manusov *et al.* (1994) interpreted Schonbach's theory of conflict escalation as:

> A severe reproach that threatens another's sense of control or esteem [and] tends to escalate conflict. This potential negative spiral moves disputants away from discussing underlying issues associated with relational problems and distracts them from looking ahead toward options of or managing problems. (p. 2)

Employees and supervisors, aware of this negative possibility can, if trained in interpersonal communication, diffuse verbal threats and guide the interpersonal transaction toward satisfactory resolution.

Putnam and Jones (1982) found that confrontation "frequently leads to round-robin, attack-defend arguments" that could "escalate into a lose-lose situation ... when an attack-defend pattern evolves into sequences of attack-attack or defend-defend" (p. 191). The goal of this type of communication is to use coercive verbal behavior (usually the supervisor) to force the other (usually the employee) to comply.

Interpersonal Negotiation

Putnam and Jones (1982) identified two strategy categories of negotiation: threat and promise. Promising tactics were identified as those that communicated expectations for future behavior based on rewards. Threat tactics are generally associated with anti-social or negative persuasion. Negative

strategies, although potentially non-productive, have been shown to lead to compliance when threat was perceived as serious (Bonoma & Tedeschi, 1974) or appropriate and legitimate (Brown, 1968). When supervisors or employees are faced with aggressive affronts, their behaviors are based on their decision to either reciprocate and chance the "spiral" effect or comply and possibly appear weak.

Promises were also reciprocated and often led to cooperative negotiation (Krauss & Deutsch, 1966). Negotiation researchers have investigated the timing and size of concessions (promises) during the process to determine the conditions conducive for tactical reciprocity. The "levels of aspiration" theory states that the party with high aspirations will be countered by high aspirations (Seigel & Fouraker, 1960). That is, if one party's (either supervisor or employee) expectations involve a big gain, then the other person will also expect big gains. The graduated reciprocation in tension reduction theory (GRIT) states that concessions will be reciprocated with concessions, and concessions will become increasingly larger in subsequent negotiation events (Osgood, 1959). Both theories have been supported. Komorita & Barnes (1969) suggested that conditions of negotiation influenced the process. Pressures or the importance of the outcome for both supervisor and employee to reach agreement produced many mutual concessions and trial agreements. In the organization, supervisor and employee can gain, potentially, in status through the success of the interpersonal

transaction. Similarly, both employee and supervisor has something to lose, potentially, if the interpersonal transaction is unsuccessful as prescribed by or described to other members of the organization. Seemingly, then, one might speculate that supervisors and employees would automatically proceed towards mutual goal attainment with minimal conflict. Research in organizational communication and our own experiences as organizational members suggest that conflicts abound and impact relationships between supervisors and employees. Interpersonal communication strategies that were mutually rewarding showed the greatest profit for both sides (supervisor and employee). However, Turner (1990) found that organizational teams lowered their levels of aspirations after hearing the other team's arguments even if their goals were incongruent. The structure of the interpersonal communication process, although an important variable, shares importance with the content of the negotiation communication. Having both supervisor and employees competent in interpersonal communication strategies and practices would likely reduce the incongruities in their views as well as their interpersonal goals in the organization.

Communication Competence

The skills approach to communication competence, according to Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), involves communication that is effective, appropriate and flexible. The effectiveness and appropriateness of interpersonal communication, according to

Canary and Spitzberg (1987), are dimensions that should, but do not always, exist during supervisor-employee communication. The supervisor's and/or employee's communication may be effective but not appropriate. That is, he or she may guide the transaction using coercive and mutually unsatisfactory methods. The supervisor's and/or employee's communication may be appropriate, if it does not break with individual or organizational rules and established norms, yet ineffective in achieving interpersonal communication competence. Barge and Hirokawa (1989) suggested as the foundation for leadership include:

> She or he must possess various encoding and decoding skills that enable her or him to produce and sequence communicative symbols and messages so as to facilitate the group's ability to understand and deal with existing barriers and problems appropriately. (p. 172)

Competition for opposing goals from either supervisor or employee, however, is not often conducive to collaboration, and, again, may require more power of persuasion than anything else. Aggressive and uncooperative negotiation behaviors by either employee or supervisor is often the hallmark of the distributive "crisis bargaining event" where disputants stray from the substantive issues and attack on the basis of personal and emotional issues (Manusov, *et al.*, 1994; Sabourin, 1995).

Perhaps, these conclusions suggest some insight into our current understanding of interpersonal communication between supervisor and employee. Supervisors and employees probably want

to behave competently and want to be guided in their efforts by a training in interpersonal communication competence (Canary & Spitzberg, 1984). Conflicting sides reach more mutually satisfactory resolutions when they are guided by a competent communication skills.

A second conclusion of this literature review is that without cooperative training in interpersonal communication, transactions between supervisor and employee may suffer. The "aftermath" may leave organizational members (supervisor and employee) unsure that any communication transaction between them will be satisfactory. Organizational members may become disheartened and uncertain of their abilities to communicate competently in other transactions. Fear of the affects of an incompetent communication transaction may cause members to remain silent or hesitant to participate in future transactions, and this may render them ineffective organizational members (Gottman, 1979).

A supervisor's or employee's communication competence is judged, in part, by her or his abilities to determine appropriate communication strategies in specific situations. The next part of this essay examines Gray's texts (1992, 1993 & 1994) on how men and women (as different cultures) might be used as a root metaphor for communication between supervisor and employee.

The importance of interpersonal communication co-training of supervisors and employees is essential if their communication transactions are to be successful. If all members of an

organizational work team are taught interpersonal communication skills, the supervisor no longer assumes responsibility for communication success. These all-important responsibilities, then, are shared by both supervisor and employees. As a result of this training, organizational members (supervisors and employees) are sensitized to interpersonal communication competence and its proper role in the organization. One of the purposes of this co-training is to place communication competence and all its tendrils at the forefront of acceptable communication behaviors for all organizational members. As a result of this co-training, organizational members should recognize the importance of effective communication to personal goal attainment and satisfaction. This co-training will increase the likelihood that effective communication strategies and skills will be used in the pursuit of personal and organizational goals.

Mars and Venus at Work

Gray (1992, 1993, and 1994) discusses the differences between men and women in their interpersonal relationships. This metaphor provides an interesting foundation for the discussion of the relationships between supervisors and employees. These work relationships are similar to the inter-gender relationships Gray discusses in three ways. First, these relationships are on-going in that the participants interact with each other on a daily basis. Second, these relationships are important to the

participants in that they affect their self-image and their self-concept. Third, these relationships form the basis for of one's standing in the community -- whether social or professional.

Using the metaphor from Gray's writings, lets take a look at how supervisors and employees come from different cultures, or at least different starting points.

Supervisors are from Mars

Assuming that supervisors are from Mars, an examination of Gray's work will offer some interesting insights. Although applied to men, the characteristics Gray discusses can be applied to supervisors in the workplace. They include:

- "A man's [supervisor's] sense of self is defined through his [or her] ability to achieve results" (Gray, 1992, p. 16).
- "To offer a man [supervisor] unsolicited advice is to presume that he [or she] doesn't know what to do or that he [or she] can't do it on his [or her] own" (Gray, 1992, p. 17).
- "Generally speaking, when a woman [employee] offers unsolicited advice or tries to 'help' a man [supervisor], she [or he] has no idea of how critical ... she [or he] may sound to him [or her]" (Gray, 1992, p. 21).

- "A man [supervisor] wants to make improvements when he [or she] feels he [or she] is being approached as the solution to a problem rather than as the problem itself" (Gray, 1992, p. 28).
- "To feel better Martians [supervisors] go into their caves to solve problems alone" (Gray, 1992, p. 31).
- "Just as a man [supervisor] is fulfilled through working out the intricate details of solving a problem, a woman [employee] is fulfilled through talking about the detail of her [or his] problems" (Gray, 1992, p. 39).
- "Men [supervisors] are motivated and empowered when they feel needed ... Women [employees] are motivated and empowered when they feel cherished" (Gray, 1992, p. 43).
- "Given the opportunity to prove his [or her] potential, a man [supervisor] expresses his [or her] best self. Only when he [or she] feels he [or she] cannot succeed does he [or she] regress back to his [or her] old selfish ways" (Gray, 1992, p. 46).
- "A man's [supervisor's] deepest fear is that he [or she] is not good enough or that he [or she] is incompetent" (Gray, 1992, p. 56).

- "Just as women [employees] are afraid of receiving, men [supervisors] are afraid of giving" (Gray, 1992, p. 56).
- "It is very difficult for a man [supervisor] to differentiate between empathy and sympathy. He [or she] hates to be pitied" (Gray, 1992, p. 82).
- "To a certain extent a man [supervisor] loses himself through connecting with his partner [employees]" (Gray, 1992, p. 97).
- "The secret of empowering a man [supervisor] is never to try to change him [or her] or improve him [or her]" (Gray, 1992, p. 146).
- "Men [supervisors] rarely say 'I'm sorry' because on Mars it means you have done something wrong or are apologizing" (Gray, 1992, p. 162).
- "Most arguments escalate when a man [supervisor] begins to invalidate a woman's [employee's] feelings and she [or he] responds to him [or her] disapprovingly" (Gray, 1992, p. 163).
- "Most men [supervisors] strive for greater and greater success because they believe it will make them worthy of love [organizational success]" (Gray, 1992, p. 189).
- "When a man [supervisor] is in a negative state, ... treat him [or her] like a passing tornado and lie low" (Gray, 1992, p. 203).

- "When a man [supervisor] hears a demanding tone, no matter how nicely you [employee] phrase your request, all he [or she] hears is that he [or she] is not giving enough. His [or her] tendency is then to give less until you appreciate what he [or she] is already giving" (Gray, 1992, p. 248).
- "When a man [supervisor] grumbles it is a good sign -- he [or she] is trying to consider your [employee] request versus his [or her] needs" (Gray, 1992, p. 266).
- "Another way men [supervisors] express their aggression is through being self-righteous. A man [supervisor] will justify his punishing behavior by blaming it on another [employee]" (Gray, 1993, p. 168).
- "During a stressful situation, a man [supervisor] needs time to mull over his [or her] thoughts and feelings until he [or she] is able to understand what he [or she] did and how he [or she] could have done it differently" (Gray, 1993, p. 160).
- "A man [supervisor], ... can best change himself [or herself] through recognizing and solving problems outside himself [or herself]" (Gray, pp. 157-158).

- "Any man [supervisor] can learn to listen if he [or she] is approached in an appreciative, welcoming manner" (Gray, 1994, p. 33).
- "When a woman [employee] is unhappy, a man [supervisor] may feel like a failure and may eventually give up trying to fulfill her [or him]" (Gray, 1994, p. 36).
- "A modern man [supervisor] is required to be a warrior but now must defend himself [or herself] without retaliating" (Gray, 1994, p. 95).
- "Men [supervisors] should duck answering a woman's [employee's] direct questions if they are provocative, turn the conversation back to her [or him] and keep their responses to a minimum to draw her [or him] out" (Gray, 1994, p. 97).
- "When a man [supervisor] is upset and he [or she] talks, then his [or her] goal is to get the listener [employee] to agree with him [or her] so that some problem can be corrected"(Gray, 1994, p. 105).
- "Men [supervisors] don't have a clue that after talking for a while they are supposed to take turns and ask women [employees] questions" (Gray, 1994, p. 155).

- "When a man [supervisor] while angry, he [or she] is generally heavily invested in being right" (Gray, 1994, p. 174).
- "It is definitely not healthy for a woman [employee] and man [supervisor] to compete for appreciation in a relationship" (Gray, 1994, p. 187).
- "Failure is deadly for a man [supervisor]" (Gray, 1994, p. 204).

Employees are From Venus

- "Many times a woman [employee] just wants to share her [or his] feelings about her [or his] day, and her husband [supervisor], thinking he [or she] is helping, interrupts her [or him] by offering a steady flow of solutions to her [or his] problems" (Gray, 1992, p. 22).
- "To feel better Venusians (employees) get together and openly talk about their problems" (Gray, 1992, p. 31).
- "A woman [employee] under stress is not immediately concerned with finding solutions to her [or his] problems but rather seeks relief by expressing herself [or himself] and being understood" (Gray, 1992, p. 36).

- "To forget her [or his] own painful feelings a woman [employee] may become emotionally involved in the problems of others" (Gray, 1992, p. 37).
- "The biggest challenge for women [employees] is correctly to interpret and support a man [supervisor] when he [or she] isn't talking" (Gray, 1992, p. 67).
- "Never go into a man's [supervisor's] cave or you will be burned by the dragon!" (Gray, 1992, p. 71).
- "A women's [employees] self-esteem rises and falls like a wave. When she [or he] hits bottom it is a time for emotional housecleaning" (Gray, 1992, p. 113).
- "The most common way a woman [employee] unknowingly start arguments is by not being direct when they share their feelings" (Gray, 1992, p. 164).
- "If a woman [employee] is not asking for support a man [supervisor] assumes he [or she] is giving enough" (Gray, 1992, p. 247).
- "A woman [employee] only grumbles in response to a request if she [or he] feels that she [or he] is being unfairly used" (Gray, 1993, p. 181).

- "One of the most common of those assumptions manifests itself as what we call 'mind reading.' Because men [supervisors] and women [employees] do not realize how different they are, they assume that they know what the other is thinking or feeling before it has been clearly stated" (Gray, 1993, p. 116).
- "To get support from a man [supervisor], a woman [employee] must learn to ask. If she [or he] doesn't ask, she [or he] will not get" (Gray, 1993, p. 182).
- "When his {supervisor's] partner [employee] is upset with him [or her] needs to remember that she [or he] has temporarily forgotten how wonderful he [or she] is. To remember, she [or he] needs to feel heard" (Gray, 1994, p. 35).
- "The lack of communication in relationships is the number one reason contemporary women [employees] feel dissatisfied" (Gray, 1994, p.64).
- "When a woman [employee] is convinced that she [or he] is not alone in coping with and solving life's [work's] problems, she [or he] feels deeply comforted" (Gray, 1994, p. 85).

- "When a woman [employee] is upset, it is extremely difficult for her [or him] to appreciate a man's [supervisor's] explanations, or indeed his [or her] rational approach" (Gray, 1994, p. 108).
- "Men [supervisors] don't realize how important and soothing their attention is to a women [employee]" (Gray, 1994, p. 144).

These are not all the statements that could be pulled from Gray's work. However, they certainly are representative of all the conclusions in Gray's works. Most of us can relate fairly easily to these descriptions of supervisors and employees. We are sure that each reader can relate to the descriptions of a supervisor she or he had in many jobs. Similarly, we are convinced that we have all witnessed employees, and perhaps even ourselves, fit the descriptions of employees in the statements above. Although Gray's work is not scientific (Marano, 1997), the conclusions he reaches certainly describe, in many cases, the relational patterns between supervisors and employees. Marano (1997) points out that Gray studied zero couples in his 1992 work, Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus and that he had not published a scholarly journal article. He points out that Gray's Ph.D. was issued from Columbia Pacific University, a correspondence course. Marano (1997) concludes, "[Gray], who isn't licensed to practice psychology but is allowed to work as a

'spiritual counselor' in California because of his nine-year stint as a monk" (p. 28).

We certainly do not want to suggest in any way that we believe that using Gray's men/women statements implies any relationship to the gender of the supervisor or employee. However, due to the patriarchal nature of our society, it seemed appropriate to use the male metaphor for the supervisor and the female metaphor for the employee.

Discussion

As we stated in the beginning of this paper, just like marital counseling is more likely to be successful if the wife and husband are being trained or counseled together, we believe it appropriate to train supervisors and employees together in interpersonal communication skills. We used Gray's conclusions to try and highlight the differences between supervisors and employees. They were helpful for illustrative purposes.

In taking this approach to training, we believe the different assumptions made by supervisors and employees about their communication relationship can be discussed openly during the training sessions. In addition, both supervisor and employees will receive the **same** training, at the **same** time, and at the **same** pace. We believe this to be true regardless of the trainer conducting the sessions, the content of the training, or the

duration of the training. An added benefit to this training is that the individual member of the work group will also learn to communicate more effectively with each other. They will learn the best strategies and practices to achieve communication competence at the same time as well.

This approach to interpersonal communication training seems logical and appropriate. However, too many training sessions are conducted with a room full of supervisors or prospective supervisors -- and not with their employees. The relationships that are important are those between the supervisor and her or his employees. Yes, supervisors have interpersonal relationships with other supervisors and, yes, they need to learn to communicate effectively with each other. However, for the most productive communication functioning in the workplace, the most important daily interpersonal relationships in the organization occur between supervisor and employee. Supervisors also have supervisors -- therefore interpersonal communication training should occur with the supervisors and the supervisors' supervisor.

Let us conclude with an interesting communication twist to communication in the modern organization. Some of the statements below are uttered between supervisors and employees, some between employees and supervisors. McCormack (1997) pointed out the ten most toxic lies in contemporary business. The list of lies was developed from his personal experience as a manager and from discussions with other managers. We believe that each of these

lies can be addressed best through improved interpersonal communication between supervisors and employees and employees with each other. These lies are:

"I can keep a secret."

"This was a rational decision."

"I want totally honest feedback"

"The check is in the mail."

"You're the only one we're talking to."

"It's business. It's not personal."

"The customer comes first."

"I'll call you right back."

"We judge people on their performance."

"The boss is clueless." (p. 3C)

With appropriate communication skills, these "lies" can be addressed as they are uttered. In fact, they might never be uttered by a supervisor or employee with the appropriate training in interpersonal communication. We believe that these lies, as discussion points during training sessions, would provide excellent starting points for a discussion that would illuminate the differences between supervisors and employees. A discussion of these differences will facilitate the development of improved interpersonal communication between supervisors and employees during their daily interactions in the workplace.

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